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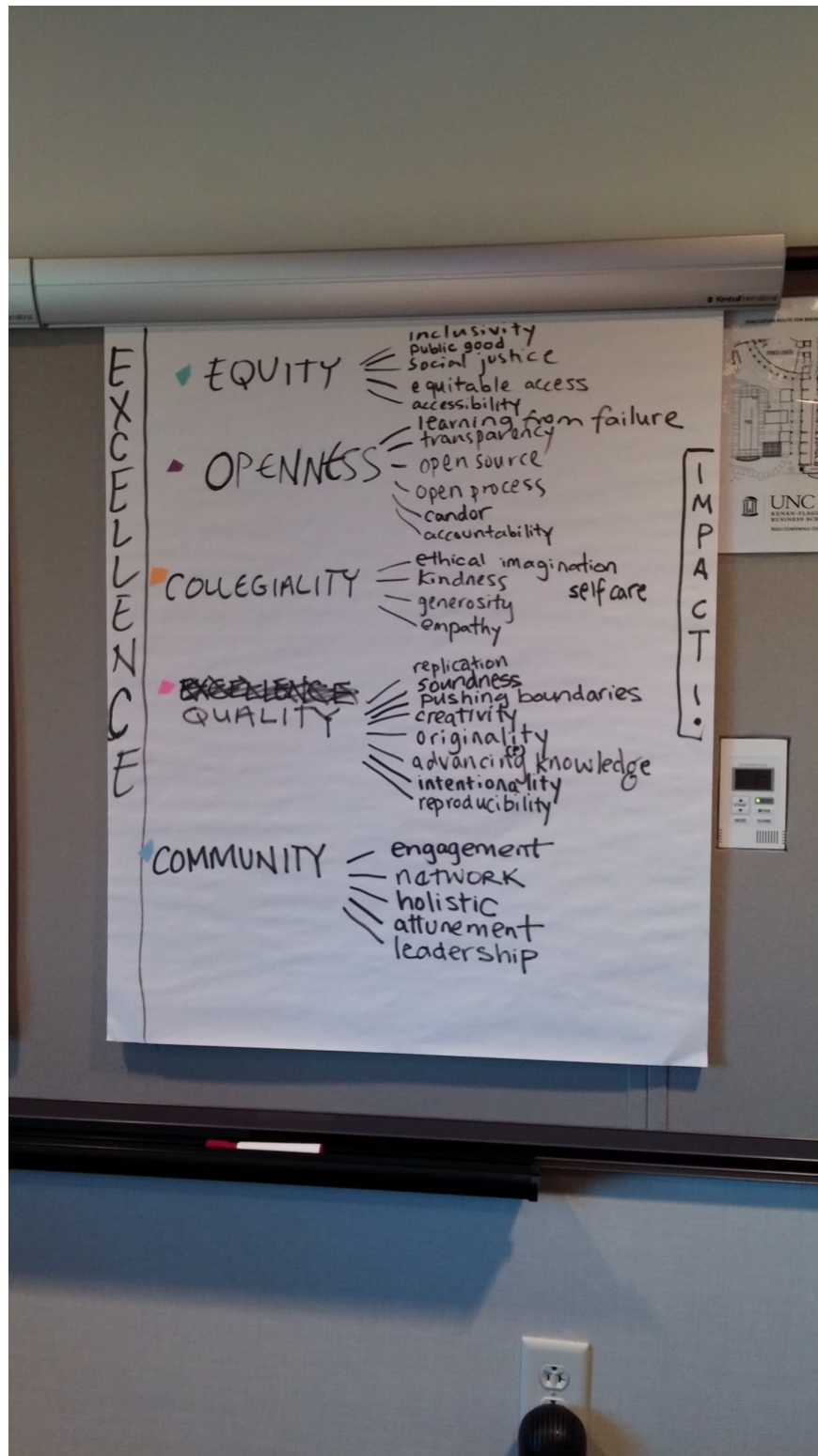
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## Influence vs. impact: which are humanists really trying to achieve?

*Apologies for the false dichotomy I've set up by my framing of this post in its title as "impact versus influence". It's a result of the quickblogging process, one that Christopher Long, Rebecca Kennison, Nicky Agate, Simone Sacchi, jasonrhody and I agreed upon as a means of digesting and sharing our daily work at the TriangleSCI meeting.*

Yesterday, the #humetrics team spent the better part of our day articulating values, outputs, processes, and metrics that humanistic research results in. Our idea was that if we could "reverse engineer" metrics from values and practices, that we could come up with metrics that are more humane: they not only reflect and incentivize the practices that humanists value most, but also help humanists avoid the "impact trap" that many in STEM find themselves a part of.

Our team came up with a list of values that fall into several general areas: equity, openness, collegiality, quality, and community:



(It's important to note that our list is by no means exhaustive, and for the most part it draws upon our own personal experience and is not as informed by the existing research in this area. We're aware of that limitation—the list is mostly meant to be a starting point for thinking

about metrics.)

As you can see, these core values are flanked on either side by two over-arching desires: for research excellence and for research impact. It's upon the latter point that I want to think aloud for a few minutes.

"Impact" is a term with very particular connotations, depending upon where you stand in the world.

From the STEM and social sciences perspective, it's often related to measurable changes in the world that are attributable to research outcomes (nod to Cameron Neylon for that succinct definition). Much of the time, this results in an emphasis upon research commercialization, economic impacts, or public health impacts.

For the humanities, "impact" is also often tied to money: how many jobs the cultural sector produces, income related to cultural activities like the film industry or museum openings, and so on. But as the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council has pointed out, there's a hierarchy of impact assumed in our current neoliberal environment, one that puts economic value above all other values—and that should not be the case, especially for the humanities. And as David Budtz Pedersen at the Humanomics Research Center at the University of Copenhagen has pointed out, "the humanities may find many pathways into society, some of which are deeply integrated in the functioning and affluence of modern liberal societies."

We discussed the need to push back against the idea of "impact" as outcome oriented (especially as those outcomes relate to the economy), and to also reclaim the term "impact" to mean what humanists want it to mean—in all its messiness, and sometimes at odds with what's demanded of researchers by the institutions, governments, private funders, and public that want to see an easy-to-digest statement of "return on investment" from the humanists whose work they support.

What remains to be seen—what we'll tackle tomorrow—is whether it's actually possible to find metrics to relate to less-tangible values, beyond economics: those that tell us whether humanities research is truly changing a discipline, affecting the way the public thinks, or having any other number of personal and societal impacts.

Perhaps a better way to think about what humanists wish to achieve is to use the term “influence” instead of impact?

